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Governor Fletcher names Secretary for Cabinet for Health and Family Services

Mark Birdwhistell Brings Extensive Health and Human Service Background to New Role

Governor Ernie Fletcher today named Mark D. Birdwhistell secretary of the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS).



"Ensuring affordable quality health care is a major goal of mine. To accomplish this, I am very pleased to appoint Mark Birdwhistell to this critically important position," said Governor Fletcher. "The depth of experience and knowledge he brings to this position from more than 25 years of work in the health and human services field will serve the people of Kentucky well."

For the past two years, Birdwhistell has served as CHFS undersecretary for health, overseeing the areas of Medicaid, public health, health policy and mental health and mental retardation services.

In this capacity, he has spearheaded many high-profile initiatives such as Medicaid Modernization, including development of the KyHealth Choices 1115 waiver proposal for Medicaid and expanded newborn screening. He is also a key advisor in health insurance matters for the Fletcher administration.

"It is an honor to serve under Governor Fletcher, as he knows and understands the fine points of health care, especially Medicaid, and their importance to moving Kentucky forward," said Birdwhistell. "We must continue to draw from the best practices in other states and the private sector for health and family services. I'm proud to be able to play a role in improving the health, and ultimately the quality of life, for Kentuckians."

Birdwhistell has extensive experience in health care management in both the private and public sectors. He served as CEO of CHA Health for six years. He also was associate hospital director for managed care at the University of Kentucky (UK) Hospital and director for program development and budget in the Department for Medicaid Services from 1989-1994. His government experience includes 17 years in human services programs.

Birdwhistell completed his undergraduate work at Georgetown College, where he earned a degree in social work, and has a master's in public administration from UK. He was recently appointed to the Council on State Governments' prestigious Health Policy Task Force. He serves on advisory boards for the Martin School of Public Policy and Administration at UK.

A Lawrenceburg native, Birdwhistell and his wife, Martha, still reside there. His son, Matthew, is in his second year at the Pikeville College School of Osteopathic Medicine and his daughter, Mary Alice, is a freshman at Georgetown College.

Matthew D. Bassett will continue as CHFS chief of staff and will also serve as a senior adviser to the Governor on health policy.

The appointment follows an announcement by James W. Holsinger, Jr., M.D., last week that he is leaving the post to return to the UK faculty and spend more time with his family.

CHFS Focus Employee Spotlight: Heather Nichols - Working to combat welfare fraud

Heather Nichols has a diverse and interesting work history. She's been an investigator, a supervisor, an assembly line worker, a mail-order bride company employee and intends to become a registered nurse.



Today she is an assistant director in the Division of Special Investigations with the Office of Inspector General. Nichols has worked in OIG as an investigator and as a supervisor since 1999. She also worked in the Clark County Department for Community Based Services' Family Support office from 1992-1999.

However, before joining state government, she had a variety of jobs while in school, including two with Lexington horse farms, one with a department store, a television station - WDKY in Lexington, on the assembly line at Toyota and even with a Russian mail-order bride company, where she prepared mailings for prospective customers.

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Nichols graduated from the University of Kentucky in 1991 with a bachelor's degree in political science. She recently re-enrolled to pursue a registered nursing degree. "I hope to obtain that degree by 2008," Nichols said.

In her current position, Nichols reports directly to Director Steve Brodt, assists with the development of policy and procedures and trains new investigators. The Division of Special Investigations is the primary investigative unit within OIG and focuses on investigating and eliminating waste, fraud and abuse in Medicaid and other welfare and assistance programs, and conducts special investigations under the authority of the inspector general.

"I work with a wonderful group of focused, professional and dedicated individuals," Nichols said. "It's refreshing to be involved with staff committed to doing the right thing."

In 2004, OIG fraud and abuse investigations detected more than \$4 million in total program losses. Anyone who suspects fraud or abuse in health and welfare programs can call 1-800-372-2970 to report information to OIG's Special Investigations Division. Almost 5,300 calls were received in 2004, up from 4,600 in 2003.

"I feel very fortunate to have Heather as an assistant director," said Brodt. "Her experience in DCBS and as an investigator in Special Investigations makes her highly qualified to oversee many of the management functions in our division."

Nichols' experiences with OIG have been favorable and provided her opportunities for professional and personal growth. "My job with OIG has allowed me to see parts of our state that I never would have seen otherwise," she said. "I've had the opportunity to travel to all parts of our state and see first hand different Kentucky regions and subcultures."

When asked about future professional goals, Nichols indicated she definitely has plans. "Because our excellent state retirement system allows for young retirement, I'll be able to pursue a second life, so to speak," she said. "I plan to obtain an RN degree and work as a traveling nurse."

"Heather's work ethic and dedication have made her a valued and respected investigator and I'm certain that those same qualities will allow her to excel as a nurse," said Inspector General Robert J. Benvenuti, III.

Nichols lives in Winchester with her husband of nine years, Dan, and a houseful of wonderful, furry animal children. In her spare time she enjoys jogging, taking her dogs for walks and attending Christview Christian Church in Winchester.

CHFS Focus Program Spotlight: Cabinet honors families during Adoption Month

By Anya Armes Weber



Above: Children and Family Services Undersecretary Eugene Foster, Ed.D. and DCBS Commissioner Tom Emberton Jr. present the Holland family with their "Forever Family" award at the Nov. 3 reception. The Hollands are from Covington and represent the Northern Kentucky Service Region. Patty and Ken Holland attended the ceremony with daughters Amanda, 16; Ferreh, 9; and Terreh, 8. Three-year-old son Jeremy stayed home that night.

Governor Ernie Fletcher has proclaimed November Adoption Awareness Month in Kentucky. In commemoration, the Cabinet is recognizing the difference all adoptive families are making for their children and promoting adoption all month.

On Nov. 3, the Department for Community Based Services honored 16 families with "Forever Families" appreciation awards at a Frankfort Country Club reception. The families honored each represent one of the 16 DCBS regions.

"All adoptive families provide an invaluable opportunity for Kentucky's children," said Cabinet Secretary James W. Holsinger Jr., M.D.. "DCBS staff chose these 16 for their outstanding dedication. By opening your hearts and your homes to these children, you have truly made and will continue to make an enormous difference in their lives."

The "Forever Families" awards were established in 2003 to recognize parents from each region who provide extraordinary support to other adoptive families and further state adoptions in their communities. Most families have adopted sibling groups, older children or children with special needs. Many of the award-winning parents are active in their local adoption mentoring programs.

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Former Child Permanency Branch Manager Charla Pratt was also honored at the reception with the Champion for Permanency Award. The award goes to a DCBS employee for continued dedication and service to ensure permanency for Kentucky's children through adoption.

Photos and biographies of the 16 award-winning families will be displayed in the Capitol through Jan. 1.

The number of public adoptions in Kentucky continues to rise: 606 in 2003; 724 in 2004; and 902 this year.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recently awarded Kentucky more than \$1 million in bonus money for exceeding its adoption goals for 2004.

The federal Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 requires all states to work to quickly move children into permanent homes rather than letting them languish in foster care. Eighty-five percent of this year's adoptions were foster parent adoptions.

"The Cabinet has significantly reduced the amount of time a child spends in foster care," said Children and Family Services Undersecretary Eugene H. Foster, Ed. D. "The families we've honored, as well as our devoted staff, have contributed to that success by stepping up recruitment efforts on the local level. Word of mouth has been our greatest advertisement for parents to explore the possibility of adoption."

Patty and Ken Holland, honorees from the Northern Kentucky Region, have adopted three children. Patty said she wishes people could see that the children waiting for adoption are wonderful.

"Lots of people think that just because they come from a bad home or had a bad upbringing, that they are also bad. I don't want that to be the myth they believe," she said. "These children want to blossom. They want to do what is right. They want to please you. All it takes is somebody to lift them up and let them shine."

OHRM Intranet site provides helpful information for CHFS employees

In the Office of Human Resource Management, our goal is to use the Intranet as the main communication medium between us and our clients.



Since the introduction of the new CHFS Intranet site, our office Web site address has changed to <http://chfsnet.ky.gov/afa/ohrm/>. Please bookmark this address so you can find information quickly.

OHRM's Intranet site contains information about each of its specific focus areas: Employee Management, Personnel Administration and Training and Organizational Development. However, it also provides resources and information on specific topics, including:

- Hiring process
- Personnel procedures/forms
- Language access procedures for services to persons with limited English proficiency
- Employee relations
- Employee recognition
- Employee survey results
- Employee suggestion instructions/winners
- Strategic planning guidelines

OHRM staff is always interested in providing excellent customer service. Be sure to contact Connie Bolin (ConnieF.Bolin@ky.gov) with your suggestions to improve the site.

2005 'Forever Families'

Award winners from each of the Cabinet's 16 regions and their hometowns are:

Barren River, Scottsville: Jack and Ruth Trent
Big Sandy, Van Lear: Harold and Lori Underwood
Bluegrass Fayette, Lexington: Willie and Betty Howard
Bluegrass Rural, Harrodsburg: Paul and Mary Anna Welch
Cumberland Valley, London: Jim and Liz Lewis
FIVCO, Olive Hill: John and Donna Stamper
Gateway/Buffalo Trace, Morehead: Gary and Judy Gulley
Green River, Henderson: Donald and Eltrander Floyd
KIPDA Jefferson, Louisville: Robert and Annette Bowman
KIPDA Rural, Eminence: Bill and Cathy Fogarty
Kentucky River, Jenkins: Scottie and Jamela Billiter
Lake Cumberland, Somerset: Michael and Camie Meece
Lincoln Trail, Elizabethtown: Kevin and Amy Smith
Northern Kentucky, Covington: Ken and Patty Holland
Pennyrile, Princeton: Mickey and Marilyn Walls
Purchase, Murray: Thomas and Diana Warren

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Flu Vaccine Recommendations May Change Due to Distribution Delays

Local health departments have option of focusing on high priority individuals

Due to delays in vaccine production and distribution, influenza vaccine supply has varied across the state this flu season. As a result, the Department for Public Health recommends that local health departments assess flu vaccine availability and if necessary return to focusing on vaccinating the most vulnerable populations in their communities.



Communities experiencing vaccine shortages – either temporarily or for the remainder of the season – may choose to recommend that only individuals in the two highest risk priority groups as identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention be vaccinated in order to protect those at greatest risk for flu complications.

“All people who fall into these high-risk categories should be encouraged to seek influenza vaccination,” said DPH Commissioner William D. Hacker, M.D. “High-risk Kentuckians should be aware that there is still time to be vaccinated since widespread influenza in Kentucky is usually not seen until December at the earliest.”

Hacker said the DPH will continue to work with local health departments throughout the flu season to make sure all available vaccine is distributed as needed.

Those identified by the CDC as the most at-risk for flu complications, or tier one risk priority, include: individuals 65 years or older with or without chronic health conditions; residents of long-term care facilities; individuals 2-64 with chronic health conditions; children 6-23 months; pregnant women; health-care workers; household contacts of children; and out-of-home caregivers of children younger than 6 months.

Tier two is made up of household contacts of children and adults at increased risk for flu-related complications and healthy people 50-64.

January and February are traditionally the peak months for the illness in the state. As of this date, no culture-confirmed cases of flu have been reported this season in Kentucky.

Each year, around 36,000 Americans die of the flu. Many who die are in medically high-risk categories.

Individuals who desire vaccination should continue to contact their providers about vaccine, since it may well arrive later than anticipated. Unlike last season, control of the distribution of influenza vaccine was not given to the public health sector, but left in the hands of private manufacturers and distributors.

Healthy Kentuckians ages 5-49 may opt for the nasal spray vaccination, which appears to be in adequate supply throughout the nation.

“We also remind everyone the best way to prevent flu this season is to continue to follow the advice your mother gave you,” said Hacker. “Wash your hands frequently, cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze and stay home when you are sick.”

For more information on the 2005-06 flu season, visit the DPH Web site at <http://chfs.ky.gov/dph/Influenza.htm>, call the Kentucky Influenza Hotline at (502) 564-5353 or visit the CDC’s Web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/>



Fletchers extend holiday wishes, authorize early distribution of Dec. 30 paychecks

Governor and Mrs. Fletcher would like to extend their sincere wishes for an enjoyable, wonderful holiday season to all state employees and their families.

Recognizing the long-standing tradition of paying state employees prior to the Christmas holiday, Governor and Mrs. Fletcher are carrying on this tradition by authorizing all personnel departments to issue its employees’ final December paychecks on Dec. 22.

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CHFS Focus Health Tip of the Week: Cut calories with simple substitutions

By Anne Parr, R. N.

Preparing a healthy holiday meal doesn't have to be a hassle. You can enjoy a delicious and healthy meal this holiday season with just a few simple substitutions.



Think outside the box

- Use broth instead of butter to sauté foods.
- Substitute 1/3 cup mayonnaise and 1/3 cup non-fat yogurt for 2/3 cup of mayonnaise.
- Use skim or fat-free milk instead of whole and even 2 percent milk.
- Try low-fat or non-fat buttermilk in place of whole milk.
- Use plain, low-fat or nonfat yogurt instead of sour cream.
- Eat skinless chicken or turkey.
- Think egg substitutes: 1 1/2 large egg whites or 3 tablespoons egg substitute equal 1 large egg.
- Use Splenda® as a substitute instead of sugar -- for every teaspoon of Splenda® instead of sugar you save 45 calories. (note: Splenda® is ideal for baking at up to 450 degrees Fahrenheit).
- Try applesauce instead of butter or oil when baking or cooking at the rate of two-thirds the amount of oil or fat called for. Some recipes may require a little less or a little more, so start with the lesser amount and add more applesauce as needed. You can also add 1 tablespoon of oil for each 1/4 cup of applesauce when baking cookies so they won't turn out mushy.
- Be creative and use pureed fruit and vegetables as fat substitutes. Try bananas, prunes, pumpkin, squash and others. You can also use baby food to save time pureeing fresh or canned fruits and vegetables to substitute for fats in recipes. Apple butter is a great fat substitute for spice cakes and muffins, and fruit juice - orange or apple - can even be used to replace the fat in some recipes, like carrot cake.
- Substitute olive, safflower, sesame or flaxseed oils for vegetable oil.
- Forget the butter and oils and kick up the seasonings!

Have a happy and healthy holiday season.

Employee Enrichment

By Anya Armes Weber



Employee Enrichment is a weekly feature for CHFS staff. These tips for making work better focus on team building, customer service and personal development.

Small talk may seem like idle conversation, but knowing how to create it can be a valuable professional skill, as well as a help in your personal life.

Chit chatting can help put people at ease when they are meeting for the first time or beginning an important conversation. If you deal in personal customer service, small talk can help reduce tension and make clients feel more at ease. Talking about your children, with one of their drawings hanging nearby as a chat catalyst, for instance, may encourage a client to volunteer information about her own kids and making it easier, perhaps, for her to ask for help or express concerns.

You can rely on small talk to ease yourself into a conversation at a party or even in a job interview. Pick something you have in common with your talking partner – a love of a certain part of the country or sports team. If you are shy, ask a question about one your conversation partner's passions. You will be off the hook for most of that conversation and can show your interest through active listening and follow-up questions.